The Gospel Ministry.

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THE GOSPEL MINISTRY.

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PROLEGOMENA.

Rom. x. 15: "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Compare Isa. lii. 7, and Nahum i. 15.)

Rom. xi. 13: "I magnify mine office."

1 Tim. iii. 1: "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work."

2 Cor. v. 20: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ."

2 Cor. iv. 7: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels."

2 Cor. v. 18: "Hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation."

Matt. xii. 3: "Blessed are the peacemakers."

Dan. xii. 3: "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever."

THE GOSPEL MINISTRY.

THE DIGNITY AND GLORY OF THE GOSPEL MINISTRY.

It is no uncommon thing for men to disparage the office of the gospel ministry. Many a shaft of wit is made to show to better advantage by being aimed at some minister of Christ. It has been partly the custom, where church and state are in alliance, and where parishes are disposed of, like army commissions, by patronage and favoritism, and sometimes for pay, to educate the younger and more helpless members of the family for holy orders, thus making gain of godliness. The church and the ministry have suffered alike from so unscriptural and unnatural a method. Such ministry may well cover itself over with the tiles of a sacerdotal formalism to escape the disparagement they deserve.

But with us it is not so. There is no need that any disparage this calling even by implication. Still it is done. There is a wide-spread disposition to excuse the rich and the talented

from this office, as if it does not furnish sufficient scope for talent, energy, and ambition. There is a disposition to make it a charitable profession, good enough for the humble and the poor, who can hope to achieve very little for themselves and families in any other direction And the result is, that many a noble-hearted, ingenuous young man is insensibly turned away from cherishing the holy ambition to which the gospel ministry invites.

It is too common to hear expressions of pity for ministers and their families from the lips of those who do not comprehend the nature of the office nor the extent of its rewards; for if they did, they would not be slow to remove all occasion for their superficial sympathy, the very expression of which excites a glow of generous indignation in the heart of a true son of the church, even though, like Paul, he sometimes knows how to "suffer need," as well as "how to abound."

Even ministers of the gospel have unwittingly fostered a mistaken view by parading their own hardships, or those of their brethren, as if they were the only class among God's people who are called upon to endure hardness. Others, again, murmur at the hardships of the calling, when in

truth they have never yielded an honest service, or at least a loving and efficient service. The point might easily be made, that the same kind of perfunctory service would have insured failure in any other walk of life. These low views of the ministerial office are mistaken views. They find no favor in the word of God. No other calling in life is so commended in God's word, nor in his providence so blessed.

The passages cited all refer to the office of preaching the word. (Rom. x. 15), "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" Surely no other is here meant but the gospel preacher.

Rom. xi. 13, Paul says, "I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office." It is the preaching function of his apostolic office which he magnifies or glorifies. For God had said to Ananias (Acts ix. 15), "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles." Paul says (Rom. xv. 15, 16), "Grace is given to me of God, that I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God." And no less than seven times he alludes to his mission to the Gentiles in similar terms. Every

minister of Christ then may glorify his office in the same sense and with the same right.

The passage cited from Timothy evidently refers to the same office. "He that desireth the office of a bishop desireth a good work." We need not here argue the substantial sameness of the preacher, pastor, evangelist, and bishop in Scripture usage. It is sufficient for our purpose to notice that the qualifications laid down in the context clearly indicate the gospel minister.

With these words of introduction and comment it is our purpose to present *Scriptural views of the dignity and glory of the gospel ministry.*

I. This office is glorious in its titles. Of these titles let us notice four.

1. The minister is called a pastor or shepherd. Christ is the great shepherd. David says, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Paul catches up the echo of his praise, and glorifies the "God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep." Jesus Christ says, "I am the good shepherd; my sheep hear my voice." The pastor is the under-shepherd. Jeremiah, in telling of these last

days, says, "I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries"—"and I will set up shepherds over them, which shall feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the Lord." The same prophet says again, "I will give you pastors according to mine own heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." Paul says, "He hath given some pastors and teachers." 'Tis the pastor's duty and office to lead, preserve, feed, and heal. How blessed a name is this—one of the very names of Jesus Christ himself.

2. The minister is also called an elder—no empty title. The elder in the Jewish commonwealth stood in the front rank of dignity and official position, both before the kings and after the captivity, and the semblance of their rank and authority was maintained even through all the period of foreign domination. The name implies experience, gravity, wisdom, and authority. Now Paul says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in word and doctrine."

3. He is also a bishop, or overseer, as the same word in the original is rendered without

distinction. One passage will suffice in confirmation. At Miletus Paul called the elders together, both teaching and ruling elders, no doubt, and among many other injunctions and exhortations, he said: "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." The feeding is evidently the teaching function of the elder, overseer, or bishop. Now Christ is the "Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." The pastor is the under-bishop as well as the under-shepherd, a pastoral and congregational bishop, having the care of souls, whose duty it is to feed the sheep. These titles have always been glorious, hence the usurpations of an unholy ambition, by which false shepherds have "fed themselves" instead of the flock, and false bishops have "lorded it over God's heritage," as if the flock was made for them and not they for the flock

4. The minister is also Christ's ambassador. An ambassador to foreign courts is clothed with the dignity of the country he represents. Her honor and safety are largely reposed in his hands. Delicate and important trusts are

confided to him. He speaks for his king. "Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" "No man taketh this honor to himself, save he that is called of God." Pastor, elder, bishop, ambassador.

II. This office is glorious in the nature of the work.

1. The minister is a peacemaker, and Christ says, "Blessed are the peacemakers." He bears a message of "peace on earth and good will to men." There is an old controversy between God and man, as old as the garden of Eden, as old as the curse, and as fatal to man as the sentence, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." We bear a message of hope, of peace, of reconciliation. Hear it: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." "For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." How glorious a message which gives peace, pardon, redemption and eternal life to lost and guilty man. The wonder is that so glorious a message was not committed to some strong and mighty angel, or some flam-

ing seraph, to stand in mid air proclaiming the terms, "Repent and believe," "Repent or perish," and then to fly around the globe making proclamation in every clime to the sorrowing sons of earth, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." No. 'Tis not a ministration of angels. The commission is given to man. He "hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation," and "we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

He is also a peacemaker between brethren. How frail are God's people at best. Strifes and divisions sometimes come to mar the peace of brethren; and the demon of discord sometimes creeps in to embitter the sweets and joys of home itself. The tale-bearer sometimes separates fast friends and poisons the holiest bonds. The watchful and the skillful pastor is called to win them back to peace again by gentle words and Jesus' love. Some years ago a certain pastor had in his charge a bitter feud between two old men who had once been fast friends. After many disheartening failures he at last succeeded in bringing them together. They were yet full of their mutual criminations and loth to strike hands till he said, "I adjure

you by the church to which both of you belong, and by the Saviour whom you both love, 'Let by-gones be by-gones,' and 'Be ye tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.'" Then, as they took each other's hands and fell sobbing on each other's necks, he laid his hands upon their bowed and hoary heads and blessed them in Jesus' name. Suppose you that pastor would exchange the holy memories of that hour for "the pleasures of sin for a season"? "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

2. He is a comforter. The commission is, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned." How many are life's sorrows and woes. "Sickness, sorrow, pain, and death" are a fearful quartette of sisters born of sin. "Sin when it is finished bringeth forth death." I would not forget that Christ is the true comforter by the Spirit—

"Come, ye disconsolate, where'er ye languish,
Come to the mercy-seat, fervently kneel;
Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish,
Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal."

But the ministration of this heaven-born comfort belongs to the sacred office.

He not only "rejoices with them that do rejoice," but he "weeps with them that weep." He goes oftener to the "house of mourning than to the house of feasting." Is any sick? There he stands to encourage, by pointing to him that "bare our sicknesses." Is any dying? There he stands to point the dying eyes to Christ. Is there any open grave? There he stands weeping beside it. Are there any widows and fatherless? How fondly they cling to his hands as he visits them and tells them of one who promised to be the "portion of the widow," and the "father of the fatherless." Is there any wounded spirit seeking peace? Who but the minister stands readiest to tell him that "there is balm in Gilead—there is a physician there"?

3. He is the masterbuilder in the spiritual temple, of which "Jesus Christ is the chief corner-stone," "in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit."

The temples and palaces of earth reflect the glory of their builders. But how soon they crumble back into forgetfulness, and the glory of the builders crumbles away with the stone

on which their names were inscribed. The names of the masterbuilders in Solomon's temple are recorded in everlasting remembrance though their work was but a faint foreshadowing of the true temple. But her fine gold is become dim, her arches have crumbled, and "there is not left one stone above another that is not thrown down." How much more glorious shall be the remembrance of the masterbuilders in the true temple, the New Jerusalem, the "habitation of God through the Spirit." Her fine gold shall never become dim; her gates shall never be broken down. Her bulwarks shall never yield to the assaults of foes, and God will never say, "Let us depart hence."

Consider a moment the work in detail. 'Tis the minister's duty to prepare each heart to be itself a temple. He chisels and polishes the "living stones," and each stone is itself a temple. True, "ye are God's building," but it is also true that "we are laborers together with God." You may say that God labors causally, and we instrumentally, or make any other distinction you please, but it still remains that the minister is a laborer with God in preparing the souls of his people for heaven. Does earth offer any such vocation as this? The sculptor

and the painter do so mould and mix the materials of earth as to present a thing of beauty for a day. The minister adds line after line to the restored lineaments of the divine image in the soul of man, until, retouched by the Spirit, it becomes a thing of glory forever. The poet, with an enthusiasm akin to inspiration, may transport us with his rythmic numbers till we seem to stand in the very presence-chamber of the eternal glory, but the preacher of Christ tells us how we may be "like him" when we shall "see him as he is."

He is a captain of the Lord's host. Men admire military prowess; they never tire of doing homage to their heroes, and why? A strong arm and a brave heart fall not to the lot of every man, and wisdom to direct withal. There is a spontaneous loyalty in every man's heart when he is brought face to face with the heroism of a Tell, or the maturer military virtues of a Washington or a Lee. It is right that it should be so.

Now we have a warfare to accomplish more fierce and relentless than the savage wars of earth. For we fight "against principalities, against powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places." We have one great captain

made perfect through suffering. We are all soldiers of the cross. Ministers of the gospel are the captains of the bands.

"Thy saints in all this glorious war,
Shall conquer though they die;
They see the triumph from afar
With faith's discerning eye.

When that illustrious day shall rise,
And all thine armies shine
In robes of victory through the skies,
The glory shall be thine."

III. This office is also glorious in the character required of those who fill it. You will find it portrayed in full in 1 Tim. iii. 2–7.

1. He must be a man of personal holiness. He must be "blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality." "Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous." True, this is a character which all ought to cultivate. There is no intimation that there is one law for the priest and another for the people. But of all men, the necessity for personal holiness in the ministry is imperative. "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?

Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery?" No. "An instructor of the foolish and a teacher of babes" must illustrate the holiness he preaches by his own godly walk.

2. This suggests that he "must have a good report of them that are without." "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches." Riches are sometimes a passport to influence with the world, but a good name is better. "A good name is better than precious ointment." When men were set apart to official position, either as king or priest or prophet, it was the custom to pour precious ointment upon their heads till it "ran down upon the beard, even down to the skirts of the garments," and they were ever held in estimation by reason of the fragrant perfume of the holy ointment. "A good name is better." If the preacher of the word fail of this, then do men use this proverb with fatal effect, "Physician heal thyself," as they scoff at his teaching.

3. He must be a man of single eye, of consecration to his work. Such a vocation calls for a man all in earnest, aglow with his work, his face set like a flint. You have examples in Wesley, Luther, and Paul. Neither weariness,

nor persecution, nor failures could divert the great apostle of the Gentiles from the fixedness of his purpose, nor the intensity of his zeal for the saving of souls. Hear him cry, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." Nay, Jesus Christ is the great example of consecration. By day and by night, in the temple and on the sea, in Bethany and on the cross, he ceased not to preach the gospel to the poor.

4. He must be a man of faith and prayer. He must believe in his message and his mission. Humanly speaking, a man's success depends in large measure on his faith in his work. Jeremiah says, "Cursed be the man that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully." 'Tis no perfunctory, half-hearted service to which we are called. The minister cannot be silent if he would. David said, long centuries ago, "I believe, therefore have I spoken"; and Paul takes up the echo, centuries yet gone, and passes the secret of his zeal down to these last days, "we believe and therefore speak."

Still he knows that true success is of God. Paul plants and Apollos waters, and God gives the increase. The co-laborer enjoys the confidence of his co-laborer. The ambassador has the ear of his king, and he relies upon him in

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extremity. So the gospel minister has the ear of his God, and is assured that he is a prayer-hearing God. How touchingly the prophet spreads his sorrow before God when he says, "Lord, who hath believed our report?" So may the gospel minister in all time live in close communion with God by faith and prayer.

5. He must also have such culture and learning as to "convince the gainsayers" and win souls to Christ. He must be "apt to teach"; he must be learned in the books of nature and of revelation, thoroughly furnished so as to "bring out of the good treasure of his heart things new and old" for the edifying of the saints. Surely, then, this office is glorious in the character required of those who fill it.

IV. It is also glorious in its rewards. These rewards are twofold—those pertaining to this life and those pertaining to the life to come. Paul says, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." Now this proposition is more conspicuously true of the gospel minister than of any other class, for Paul urges it upon Timothy as a reason for the right ordering of himself as a minister of Christ.

1. The rewards of the gospel ministry are

ample in this life. Compare it with the unsanctified callings of earth. It gives no promise of the pleasures of sin. It has little to offer to an unhallowed and imperious ambition; but little to a heart full of covetousness, to which so many of earth's vocations make their strongest appeal. It offers no tempting bait to the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." No. Let the sons of earth, sin-born and sinning, pursue these things if they will, till the curse breaks upon them, and their very joys turn to wormwood and gall, and they say "it were better for us that we had never been born." Still, we claim that the gospel minister has the promise of all that is most desirable in this life, and his career is a true success according to a just standard—a success unequalled by the average of any other calling or profession in life.

(*a*), He has a comfortable provision for the mere bodily necessities of himself and family, sometimes supplemented by tent-making, it may be, and oftener doubled in effect by the careful management of a discreet wife. But this, too, is part of the heritage. What if the means of support are often drawn from other sources? Was not a prophet once fed by ravens in a cave, and the provision ample?

(*b*), He has high social position for hims and family, as high as the highest. I care r what aristocracy draws its lines of caste for t exclusion of others, whether of blood, or tit or talent, or wealth, the minister of Christ c always pass the lines, the most beloved a honored of them all, while his family is ma the equal of them all.

(*c*), He has the unspeakable pleasure of s ing his children cultured and educated as w as the best; and if you strike the average y will find that in true worth, morality, piety, a education, the balance is on the side of t faithful minister's family; and this may fair be reckoned among his rewards.

(*d*), Then there is the heritage of a go name and example that he leaves behind hi to cheer them on in the paths of virtue a sustain them in the day of temptation, and lu them on to noble deeds and an imperishab crown.

(*e*), There are also specific joys pertaining his work which we would not overlook. Th are the highest and holiest of earth, to be fe and not described. There are mere earth joys you profane by attempting to describe the joy of the bridegroom rejoicing in h

ride, the joy of the father as he folds his first-born in his bosom. Suppose you not that there is something like this, higher and holier than all this, in the pastor's heart as he stands wedded to his people, and his spiritual children pass in and out before him? You have only to see his greetings by the fireside, on the street, in his Sabbath-school, and by the sick-bed, his greeting by the aged grandmother and the prattling grandchild alike, to know that there is a wealth of love lavished upon him which would require the heart of an angel to reciprocate in its fulness. Oh! how the groveling callings of earth, as men rake in its muck and filth, and even its nobler aspirations and joys, do pale and grow dim beside the mere earthly rewards of the minister of Christ!

Nor need we fear that this array of its temporal rewards will incite the mere worldling to seek this calling from false motives, for they are just of that character and measure as to excite no real sympathy in the heart of the depraved and the ambitious, and they are themselves so coy that they show none of their beauties and yield none of their sweets to the self-seeking and the mercenary.

2. Be this as it may, however, touching the

minister's rewards in this life, it is clear that his rewards in the world to come shall be ineffably glorious. John, in Revelation, says, "I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." If it be true that we shall be rewarded according to our works, and that this blessedness is connected with the works which follow, who can measure the blessedness of the faithful gospel minister? Nor are we left to mere inference and conjecture. The prophet Daniel, when telling of the resurrection, says: "They that be wise (teachers, in the margin,) shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever." The apostle tells us that he expects a "crown that fadeth not away." What is it? To the Thessalonians he says, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and our joy." John tells us that one of the seven angels that had the seven vials of the wrath of God and poured them out upon the nations

came and talked with him, and showed him first the judgment of Babylon and then the marriage of the Lamb. And when he fell down at his feet to worship him, the angel said, "See thou do it not; for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus; worship God; for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Who was it? It was a spokesman for God, and one who had on earth borne testimony to Christ, or at the most, one of the prophets. And when again, overawed by the power and great glory of the angel that talked with him, he fell down to worship, he forbade him, and said, "I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book." This was evidently one of them of whom Daniel wrote: "They shall shine as the brightness of the firmament." "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us; to thy name be all the glory!"

The sons of the church have been freely given to the bar and the bank, to the farm and the forum, to merchandise and mechanics, but how few of her sons have aspired to the noblest calling of all! Shall this always be so?

Young man of hope and promise, find here your highest and holiest ambition. "Covet the

best gifts." The cry comes up from all the perishing sons of earth, "Who will show us any good?" The cause of Christ cries all around you, "Come and help us." The field is white to the harvest. Where are the laborers? Every little while another Christian hero falls at his post, and there is a gap in the ranks. Oh! that a hundred brave hearts and strong arms would leap forward to fill the vacant place. The voice of the Master is proclaiming, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Let every ingenuous loving heart say, "Here am I, send me."